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AUTHOR Hadley, Alice Omaggio
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ABSTRACT

Issues in second language teaching methodology are discussed in light of the concept of proficiency as defined in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines. It is proposed that rather than think in terms of identifying one optimal methodology for all second language learners, the profession should be seeking an organizing principle that will help make sense of the variety of methodologies and approaches already available or possible in the future. The concept of proficiency is seen as having the potential to serve as such an organizer. Ways in which one might view language instruction in the light of proficiency are presented, including proposal of several hypotheses about proficiency-based language instruction. The term "methodology" is defined and characteristics of various methodologies are compared and contrasted in terms of this organizing principle. (Author/MSE)

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Author: Alice Omaggio hadley

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PROFICIENCY-BASED INSTRUCTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR METHODOLOGY

Alice Omaggio Hadley

ABSTRACT

This article discusses issues in second language teaching methodology in the light of the concept of "proficiency," as defined in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Rather than thinking in terms of identifying one optimal methodology for all learners of second languages, the profession should be seeking an organizing principle that will help us make sense of the variety of methodologies and approaches we already have or will develop in the future. The concept of "proficiency" has the potential to serve as such an organizer. Ways in which one might view language instruction in the light of proficiency are presented in the article, including the proposal of several hypotheses about proficiency-based language instruction. Then, the term "methodology" is defined and characteristics of various methodologies are compared and contrasted in the light of this organizing principle.

INTRODUCTION

> Once, in the throes of the audiolingual revolution, we "knew" the truth. Today, I am working with only a set of working hypotheses for myself as a foreign language teacher.... (Strasheim, 1976, p. 42)

Many educators familiar with the development of language teaching practices throughout the history of the profession would agree that the primary focus of research and development activity has been to identify the best way--"the one true way"--to teach a foreign language. This search for the ideal methodology has occupied the attention and energies of researchers and practitioners alike, leading to a long series of "revolutions" and "counter-revolutions" in teaching practices. Most of those involved in the search for the best teaching method have, quite naturally, tried to convince others of the wisdom of their own particular approach. Often this attempt to win converts to a given point of view has been motivated by the very reasonable desire to achieve some sort of consensus within the profession. Yet, despite a few short-lived rallies around a common flag, the history of language teaching has been marked more often by controversy than by consensus.

Traditionally, language educators, like linguists, have grouped themselves into two fairly distinct batallions--the

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"rationalists" and the "empiricists" (Diller, 1978). The basic difference has been one of philosophy. The rationalist/process approach asserts that language learning is primarily the result of critical thinking and arises from a desire to communicate. The first task for the student is the identification of form as meaningful, a task for which problem-solving skills and strategies are needed. The empiricist/skills approach, on the other hand, assumes that language learning is the result of behavior and largely conditioned responses. The first task for the student in such approaches is the reproduction of correct forms, a task for which rote drilling is considered an essential strategy.

As far back as the sixteenth century, one can find evidence of a heated debate about the way in which languages ought to be taught. Claude de Sainliens, in his work entitled The Frenche Littelton. A most Easie, Perfect, and Absolute way to learne the frenche tongue, published in 1576, stated that one should not entangle students in rules, but allow them to practice first through dialogue memorization:

> If the Reader meaneth to learne our tongue within a short space, he must not entangle himselfe at the firste brunte with the rules of the pronunciation set (for a purpose) at the latter ende of this booke, but take in hande these Dialogues: and as the occasion requireth, he shall examine the rules, applying their use unto his purpose...(de Sainliens, cited in Kibbee, 1987)

Jacques Bellot, on the contrary, attacks this point of view in his French Method of 1588:

> There bee some holding this opinion, that the most expedient & certaine way to attaine to the knowledge of tongues is to learne them without any observation of rules: But cleane contrary I doe thinke that he which is instructed in any tongue what so ever by the onely roate, is like unto the Byrd in a cage, which speaketh nothing but that which is taught unto him and (which is much worse) not understanding that which he sayth, because he is voyde of all foundation of good and certaine doctrine...(Bellot, cited in Kibbee, 1987)

Throughout the decades following World War II, theorists and practitioners in the two warring camps transposed the debate, to the modern context, where methodologists based in cognitive psychology argued with those espousing behaviorism and tried in vain to convince one another that they were right about the way languages ought to be taught. By the 1970's many practitioners, disillusioned by the failure of the various "revolutionary" methods to deliver what they had promised, left the ranks of the absolutists to adopt an "eclectic" approach, which, for some, became the new "one true way." And with eclecticism came a new kind of diversity within the profession, at least on the issue of methodology.

The newest version of the age-old debate has erupted in the relatively recent controversy surrounding "natural" approaches to language teaching, where the use of grammatical rules and error correction techniques are discouraged in the classroom, as opposed to more "cognitive" orientations toward methodology, which maintain that students must understand the basic rule system underlying the new language and receive corrective feedback in order to improve. Many language educators who have witnessed these various versions of the same arguments over the years have become somewhat weary of the debate, and are cautious in their enthusiasm for any new trends that seem like old "bandwagons" in disguise.

It is not surprising that in the 1980s, many of us in the profession still feel the need to reach some sort of consensus about language teaching, but are not sure how this should be accomplished. The effort to establish uniform goals and standards in the aftermath of the Carter Presidential Commission on Languages and International Studies in 1979 is one manifestation of this need for consensus. One result of this effort has been the development of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, which have sparked a great deal of interest among members of the language teaching community. But because this effort represents a search for consensus about standards rather than about appropriate methodologies for reaching these standards, it marks a change in direction in the debate about language teaching. After many years of fruitless searching for the "one true way," we may be realizing at last that the controversy has been raging on the wrong battlefield all along. Instead of searching for one definitive approach to language teaching--a search that has consistently ended in frustration and a sense of failure--we have begun looking for some "organizing principle" by which our various methods, approaches, materials, and curricula might begin to make collective sense. This "organizing principle" must go beneath and beyond any one approach and relate in some clear way to "those elements of soundness and truth that are to be found in any method that has survived long enough to have received a name" (Stevick, 1976, p. 103).

PROFICIENCY AS AN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE

Elsewhere, I have proposed a rationale for choosing the concept of "proficiency" as this organizing principle and have described the concept in detail (Omaggio, 1986). Unfortunately, space does not permit a detailed description here; the brief definitions that follow review the most basic elements associated with the term. Readers unfamiliar with "proficiency" might want to refer to the source cited above for a thorough discussion of the concept.

Basically, the descriptions of language proficiency in the ACTFL Guidelines consist of a set of hierarchically arranged global definitions of language competence ranging from "Novice" to "Superior." These definitions are based on three interrelated sets of criteria: (1) function, or the types of tasks one can perform in the new language--tasks which are directly related to authentic language use; (2)

context, or the types of situations or content domains that one might be expected to handle effectively in the target language; and (3) accuracy, or the degree of precision with which one uses grammatical forms, vocabulary, discourse features, and sociolinguistic elements to get one's meaning across. The "Novice" level is characterized by discourse that is extremely limited in nature: In terms of oral proficiency, individuals may be able to produce very short utterances or a few common words or fixed expressions, but are generally not able to function in the language to get their own personal meaning across. Often, the novice level is characterized as consisting mostly of "memorized material"--that is, the language learner cannot generally use the language beyond those few words or expressions that he or she has learned, either in the classroom or through exposure to authentic language use experiences.

Individuals at the "Intermediate" level are generally able to talk about everyday topics and situations in very simple discourse, usually limited to present time, with little evidence of paragraphing. Intermediate-level speakers often have very little sense of sociolinguistic conventions and are extremely limited in vocabulary and structure. "Advanced"-level speakers, by contrast, can engage in more complex conversations involving a wider range of topics, and are not limited to one time frame, but can talk about past, present, and future events. They are capable of extended description and narration, show evidence of paragraphing, and are more sensitive to sociolinguistic factors in their speech. "Superior" speakers are capable of using an extremely wide range of vocabulary and structures, are sensitive to and use appropriate sociolinguistic and discourse features, and are capable of discussing virtually any topic they can handle in their native language. The proficiency definitions are not limited to oral skills; similar definitions exist for listening, reading, and writing in over a dozen languages.

Some Misconceptions About Proficiency

In the last few years, discussions about proficiency--both in the professional literature and at conferences and meetings across the country--have revealed that there are some misconceptions about the concept, held by various researchers and practitioners, that ought to be addressed. Several of the most common misconceptions are discussed below.

Misconception #1: **Proficiency is a new kind of methodology.** As stated earlier, the concept of proficiency is not a methodology, nor does it imply that one particular methodology is the most appropriate for building language competence. Rather, it is a set of global criteria for evaluating or measuring language competence, which is used independently of language teaching methods, curricula, or materials.

Misconception #2: **The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines imply a particular curriculum or sequence of instruction.** Because the proficiency definitions are evaluative in nature, they may

have some interesting implications for curricular design. However, the Guidelines are not meant to be a curricular outline and do not imply a particular sequence of instruction. Rather, many different kinds of curricular plans can be derived from an intelligent and careful examination of the proficiency definitions. In this way, curricula can be said to be "proficiency-based" or "proficiency-oriented."

Misconception #3: **The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are very discrete-point in nature.** This misconception may arise when one is only minimally acquainted with the guidelines, a summary document which should not be assumed to stand alone. ACTFL has offered various kinds of familiarization workshops and tester workshops to explicate and clarify the concepts represented in the Guidelines, and recent publications have devoted many pages to further elucidate the definitions. Those who have held that the Guidelines are discrete-point in nature have not thoroughly understood them. The definitions, as stated earlier, consist of statements about the kinds of language functions one can perform at the various levels of proficiency, the contexts in which these functions are typically performed, and the accuracy with which one can expect them to be performed. These definitions are not meant to be a particular checklist or catalogue of functions, contexts, or linguistic features that must be mastered at a given level; rather, they describe in a more global fashion the kinds of features one might expect to find at each of the levels described. Individuals who are at the same level of proficiency may vary quite a bit in terms of discrete features of their discourse, especially at the lower levels of proficiency. Therefore, those who try to use the Guidelines as a checklist of features to be mastered are misusing them. In this instance, a little knowledge can indeed be a dangerous thing.

Misconception #4: **Proponents of proficiency advocate a heavy emphasis on grammar and on error correction in the classroom.** Because there is a concern for developing accuracy in proficiency-oriented approaches, especially when the eventual goal is a relatively high level of competence in the language, some attention to form in language instruction is necessary. However, attention to form does not imply that there must be a heavy emphasis on grammatical rules in the classroom or that every error must be corrected on the spot. More will be said about this issue in the next section. (See Hypothesis 3.)

Although a few language educators have expressed some concern about the way in which the proficiency levels have been defined, many others have supported the concept and have expressed great interest in the proficiency guidelines as a viable way to organize our thinking as a profession in the years ahead. Many feel that by agreeing in at least a global fashion on what it means to know a language at various stages of competence, and by describing what a person can typically do with the language at each of these stages, we can begin to find a way to measure outcomes against a common metric, and to predict accurately the degree of success with which an

individual can handle a variety of needs in a whole range of situations. The descriptive power that we can obtain from this common metric can help us compare and contrast more intelligently the effects of exisiting methods and materials on student progress. It can also help us develop revised versions of approaches we personally favor, compensating for any areas of weakness in them that we might identify. Such a common organizer can also allow us to make more realistic promises to language learners about the kinds of competence they can expect to develop within a given sequence of instruction, which is something we have never really been able to do before with any degree of precision.

Because this article is devoted to the issue of methodology, I would like to propose a set of hypotheses relating to proficiency-based language teaching. Some of the key elements from these hypotheses might then serve as evaluative criteria by which methods and approaches can be compared.

METHODOLOGY AND PROFICIENCY

Definitions

Before outlining the hypotheses relating to proficiency-based instruction and discussing the way they relate to methodology, it would be useful to try to clarify first the concept of "methodology" itself. Swaffer, Arens, and Morgan (1982) conceive of methodology as a "task hierarchy"; they maintain that the differences among major methodologies are to be found in the priorities assigned to various tasks rather than to the collection of tasks themselves.

> All major methodologies, whether skill or process-oriented, aspire to the same result: a student who can read, write, speak, understand, translate, and recognize applications of the grammar of the foreign language. Methodological labels assigned to teaching activities, are, in themselves, not informative, because they refer to a pool of classroom practices *that§ are universally used (p. 31).

Therefore, it is not what activities are used so much as when and how they are used that distinguishes methods from one another. According to Swaffer and her colleagues, definitions of methods or approaches need to involve a description of: 1) the hierarchy or value structure of activities; and 2) the position of such activities in the learning sequence.

Stevick also maintains that methods are best differentiated from one another in terms of factors such as "...the place of memorization, or the role of visual aids, or the importance of controlling and sequencing structure and vocabulary, or how the teacher should respond when a student makes a mistake, or the number of times a student should hear a correct model, or whether to give the explanation before or after practice, or not at all, and so forth..." (Stevick,

1976, p. 105). The factors that he mentions go beyond the selection of learning tasks to include philosophical and theoretical principles about ways of proceeding. But whether we adopt these points of view or some other, it makes sense to differentiate methods in terms of priorities rather than make binary oppositions between and among them. In assessing the relative value of various factors in any teaching approach, we can begin to assess the degree to which that approach corresponds to the concept of proficiency.

We have been using the terms "method" and "approach" thus far somewhat interchangeably. These terms, however, are not quite synonymous. Westphal (1979) defines the terms "syllabus," "approach," "strategy," and "method" as follows:

> ...the syllabus refers to the subject matter content of a given course or series of courses and the order in which it is presented; the approach is, ideally, the theoretical basis or bases which determine the ways in which the syllabus is treated; a strategy or technique is an individual instructional activity as it occurs in the classroom (p. 120).

She goes on to explain that a "method" consists of combinations of these three factors, although some combinations are more congruent with course goals than others. For example, it would be rather difficult to expect students to become proficient enough in speaking to function easily in a foreign setting if one used a literary syllabus, a grammar-translation approach, and strategies for learning activities based primarily on translation. However, Westphal believes that "it is quite possible to meet highly 'academic' objectives using a communicative approach to the grammatical syllabus and incorporating many humanistic strategies" (11). The former combination of factors is not congruent with the goal of functional proficiency, at least not in beginning and intermediate sequences of instruction. The latter combination seems more "eclectic," in that the instructor "borrows" from communicative approaches the basic theoretical and philosophical perspectives, uses a grammatical syllabus (instead of a functional one, which some communicative approaches would suggest), and treats the subject matter using "humanistic" techniques that have been suggested in yet another type of approach. These three factors, coupled with the actual text and course materials selected and the teacher's own individual style, could be said to constitute a "method."

Again, the term "method," as redefined here, implies a hierarchy of priorities set by the instructor or the program planners rather than a "pre-packaged" set of procedures to which everyone is expected to slavishly subscribe. This latter conceptualization of "methodology" went out with the last "revolution," when audiolingualism in its purest form was abandoned for more "eclectic" approaches. As Strasheim pointed out in 1976, "...we will have to learn to deal with 'working hypotheses' rather than 'one-true-ways,' for we are moving out of the period governed by absolutes" (p. 45). The

"working hypotheses" for proficiency-based instruction are explored in more detail in the next section.

Methodology and Proficiency: Five Working Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Opportunities must be provided for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture. A proficiency-oriented method will give students, from the beginning of instruction, ample opportunities to: 1) learn language in context; and 2) apply their knowledge to coping with real-life situations. (See Omaggio (1986) for a thorough discussion.) Some of the contexts likely to be included at the elementary levels are basic travel and survival needs (food, clothing, hotel accomodations, transportation, and the like), handling daily social encounters appropriately, and coping with school or work-related situations. Students might also be taught to handle simple question-and-answer situations and discuss or write about concrete topics such as their own background, family, and interests.

This first hypothesis has various corollaries for designing or choosing a proficiency-oriented methodology.

Corollary 1: Students should be encouraged to express their own meaning as early as possible after productive skills have been introduced in the course of instruction. Therefore, methods that emphasize memorization or that severely limit personal expression in the early stages of instruction are not so easily adaptable to proficiency goals as those that encourage more creative language use. Only at the novice level do learners work almost exclusively with memorized material. To reach the intermediate range of proficiency, learners need to be able to "create with the language".

Corollary 2: A proficiency-oriented methodology promotes active communicative interaction among students. The use of small-group and paired communicative activities that allow students to practice language in context for some simulated or real communicative purpose should lead more readily to the development of oral proficiency than do methods that are primarily teacher-centered or that focus mainly on language forms and convergent answers. Communicative practice need not be totally unstructured; in fact, in the early levels of instruction, it is probably best that such activities be quite carefully structured and monitored to encourage the development of linguistic accuracy (see Hypothesis 3, below, as well as Omaggio (1986).) Communicative practice should involve exchanges of information in situations where some information gap exists, rather than involve totally predictable (and therefore non-communicative) exchanges among students.

Corollary 3: Creative language practice (as opposed to exclusively manipulative or convergent practice) must be encouraged in the proficiency-oriented classroom. Students who hope to advance in their skills beyond the novice range must

learn to "create" with the language. They must be encouraged to paraphrase, think divergently (i.e., think of many possible answers), and let their imagination and creative ability function as fully as possible within the limits of their current level of linguistic competence. Methods that help students create in the new language by including well-conceived divergent-production and imaginative tasks should build the flexibility, fluency, and strategic competence needed to achieve higher levels of proficiency, while at the same time encouraging the development of linguistic accuracy that is so important at those higher levels.

Corollary 4: A proficiency-oriented methodology emphasizes the use of authentic language in instructional materials wherever possible. The contexts for language practice should be devised, as much as possible, from culturally authentic sources. The use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint the students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials used alone. Videotapes of authentic or simulated exchanges involving native speakers, radio broadcasts, television or film, songs, and the like have long been advocated by foreign language educators as stimulating pedagogical aids. The proficiency-oriented classroom will incorporate such material frequently and effectively into instruction at all levels.

Just how to make the most effective use of authentic language materials in elementary-level classes remains somewhat unclear. Krashen (1982) maintains that people acquire language that is directed at the acquirer's current level of competence, but which includes some structures that are somewhat beyond that level as well. He asserts that language learners/acquirers will understand that which is "beyond" them from contextual cues in the message or from extralinguistic cues.

If Krashen's input hypothesis is true, then we might obtain the best results by using simplified versions of authentic materials with novice and intermediate-level students, and gradually move toward incorporating more complete, unedited language samples with advanced-level learners. One might also consider providing enough extralinguistic cues to render unedited authentic materials "comprehensible" to the beginning or intermediate students. Whether material is edited or not, it is important to choose input that is appropriate in form and content to the students' current level of proficiency. In addition, the task that students are asked to do with the authentic input must be geared to their proficiency level. The use of authentic texts as input does not imply that we should therefore abandon the use of materials created for instructional purposes. Rather, a blend of the two seems more appropriate. Krashen suggests that "...we can teach vocabulary, situational routines, grammar, whatever we like, and as long as we fill it with acquisition opportunities, as long as we keep providing

comprehensible input, we are contributing to natural language acquisition" (Krashen, 1982, p. 30). Another factor to consider is that students' proficiency levels in listening and reading may be well in advance of their proficiency level in speaking and writing. Students who could not handle certain materials well in the productive skills may be quite capable of comprehending them.

It is also important to remember that "natural language" includes the comprehensible input provided by teachers in everyday exchanges in the instructional setting that are communicative in nature, from giving directions to recounting personal anecdotes in the target language. The proficiency-oriented classroom is one in which such natural acquisition opportunities are exploited as fully as possible.

Hypothesis 2: Opportunities should be provided for students to practice carrying out a range of functions (task universals) likely to be necessary in dealing with others in the target culture. Traditional classroom instructional settings tend to limit the role of the student to that of "responder"; that is, students are most often asked to answer questions. In teacher-centered approaches, students are very seldom asked to make inquiries, act out simulated survival situations, narrate or describe events, hypothesize, argue, persuade, provide opinion, or carry out many other language functions that are necessary in everyday encounters with others in the target language. In many cases, functional practice of this sort is reserved for advanced conversation courses, many of which the majority of students never take. Proficiency-oriented methodologies should introduce students to a variety of functional tasks that have been carefully sequenced to help them cope with the real-world communication demands they will face.

Hypothesis 3. In proficiency-oriented methods there is a concern for the development of linguistic accuracy from the beginning of instruction. Reasons for this hypothesis have been argued elsewhere. (See Omaggio (1986).) The thrust of the hypothesis is that language learners need some kind of corrective and/or evaluative feedback in order to develop their language skills. This feedback may be indirect in nature and may be immediate or delayed, depending on the type of language activity in which the learner is involved. "Building toward accuracy" does not imply that students should be expected to produce only correct utterances or that an optimal methodology should provide "wall-to-wall insurance against error" (Stevick, 1980, p. 24). Learners obviously do not generally produce correct speech or writing when creating with the language. In addition, research has repeatedly shown that errors are very useful in determining an individual's current internalized rule system and yield important diagnostic information. Because proficiency-oriented methodologies encourage learners to create with the language and express their own meaning from the beginning of instruction, errors of all types are to be expected. We might, however, be able to help students produce more accurate speech if we adopt an "output hypothesis" similar to Krashen's

input hypothesis. That is, our methodologies might: 1) provide comprehensible input, in addition to formal instruction; 2) encourage students to express their own meaning within, or even slightly beyond, the limits of their current level of competence; and 3) consistently provide corrective feedback. Such an approach may produce more "comprehensible output" among our students at each stage of proficiency. It will also require the use of carefully structured activities that encourage self-expression, yet provide at some point for the monitoring and correction of errors.

The issue of error correction has been discussed at some length in the last several years, especially by those advocating the use of the "Natural Approach" in the classroom. (See, for example, Terrell (1982).) It seems, however, that those who argue that no error correction should take place in the classroom are, in actuality, advocating indirect correction via more comprehensible input. In other words, the real issue in this case is not whether or not errors should be corrected, but rather the degree to which errors should be directly pinpointed for students. Those advocating "no" error correction in the classroom are assuming that all learners can attend well enough to the indirect feedback they receive through further input and thus eventually self-correct. In "natural approach" methodologies, however, students are often given direct feedback in a more pin-pointed fashion on written homework outside of class, which compensates for the lack of such direct feedback in the classroom. In any case, the degree of the directness of feedback is not the central issue addressed in this hypothesis about proficiency-based instruction. Rather, it states that some form of corrective feedback needs to be given--whether it be written, oral, direct, or indirect--in order for students to progress in their language skills development.

Hypothesis 4. Proficiency-oriented methodologies respond to the affective needs of students, as well as to their cognitive needs. One of the hallmarks of several recent methodological developments is the greater emphasis on the affective aspects of learning and acquisition (for example, the "Counseling-Learning Approach," "Confluent Education," "The Natural Approach," and "Suggestology"). Proponents of "humanistic" methods believe that learning should be aimed at the deeper levels of understanding and personal meaningfulness to be maximally effective. Such methods emphasize the need to reduce anxiety and tension, which inhibit performance and create resistance to natural language acquisition and to learning. Stevick (1980) emphasizes the close relationship between poor performance and anxiety and tension in the learning environment (due to self-critique as well as criticism by others). This relationship is central to Krashen's "filter hypothesis," based on the concept of the "affective filter," somewhat akin to a mental block: "With acquirers who do not have self-confidence, where the situation is tense, where (in Stevick's words) they are on the defensive, the filter goes up" (Krashen, 1982, p. 25). When the affective filter goes up, the resultant feelings are

conflict, anxiety, aloneness, and a sense of guilt for failing. These feelings are clearly out of harmony with the best conditions for acquisition (Stevick, 1980).

Whether or not we agree *per se* with the need to include certain types of "affective activities" in the classroom, most language educators today would agree that students will probably achieve a given degree of proficiency more rapidly in an environment that is accepting, relaxed, and personalized.

Hypothesis 5. *Proficiency-oriented methodologies promote cutural understanding, and prepare students to live more harmoniously in the target-language community.* For many years, foreign language educators have been emphasizing the need to incorporate a cultural syllabus into the curriculum and to promote global awareness and cross-cultural understanding. (See, for example, Stern (1981).) The use of techniques to increase cultural understanding should receive a high priority in any task hierarchy that defines a proficiency-oriented method.

Comparing Methodologies: Some Concluding Remarks

Elsewhere, I have described a variety of methodologies in some detail and have compared their features in terms of their orientation towards the concept of proficiency (Omaggio, 1986). Space does not permit such an inventory here, but readers are invited to use the hypotheses outlined above to make some comparisons on their own and draw their own conclusions. As mentioned earlier, many educators have adopted an eclectic approach to teaching, using the best elements from the wide range of approaches available. Throughout history, resourceful teachers have used their own ideas to construct a methodological framework that suits their own personal teaching style as well as the needs and interest of their students. The new emphasis on proficiency can provide an organizing framework that will help both researchers and practitioners select, compare, and evaluate those strategies and approaches that seem most conducive to building language competence. Rather than being prescriptive or restrictive in nature, such a framework permits teachers the flexibility and creative freedom that are essential to the art of teaching.

THE AUTHOR

Alice Omaggio Hadley is Associate Professor of French at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she teaches courses in methodology and demonstration classes for beginning language instruction. She is Director of the Lower Division Courses in French and supervises teaching assistants. Her work has been published in a variety of professional journals and publications. She is the author of three college French texts and has recently published *Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction*, which won the Kenneth Mildenberger Award presented by the Modern Language Association for the best book in foreign language teaching for 1986.

NOTE

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